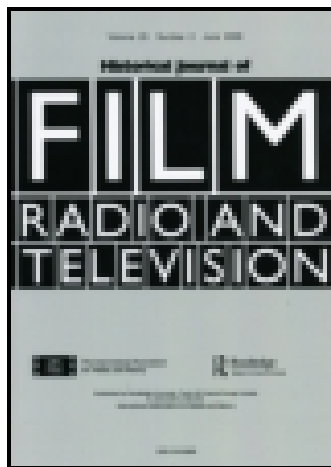


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THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH AND FILM EXHIBITION IN BELGIUM, 1926–1940

Daniel Biltereyst

More than ever nowadays an extended and careful vigilance is necessary, inasmuch as the dangers of moral and religious shipwreck are greater for inexperienced youth. Especially is this true of impious and immoral books, often diabolically circulated at low prices; of the cinema, which multiplies every kind of exhibition. . . . These most powerful means of publicity, which can be of great utility for instruction and education when directed by sound principles, are only too often used as an incentive to evil passions and greed for gain.

Pope Pius XI, 1929¹

This quote, from *Divini Illius Magistri* 31 December 1929, Pope Pius XI's Encyclical Letter, is the first public address in which the highest Catholic Church leader explicitly referred to motion pictures. There had been many other public interventions from representatives from the Roman Catholic Church on the *film problem*,² but this December 1929 Encyclical, which was primarily devoted to Christian education in modern society, no longer tried to omit the role played by cinema. *Divini Illius Magistri* still acknowledged the traditional Roman Catholic Church's scepticism towards modern mass media—such as low-priced books, radio and the motion pictures in particular. Many Catholic Church leaders still considered cinema one of the key problems of modern society, often indicated as a 'school of paganism' and 'immorality', a 'promoter of adultery', 'greed', 'evil passions', 'free love', and even as an 'auxiliary of socialism'.³ It was time, though, as Father Abel Brohée, one of the prominent leaders of the international Catholic film movement, wrote in 1927,

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that Catholics no longer committed the ‘capital sin of omission’ and strengthened their ‘crusade’ against sinful cinemas.⁴ By recognizing the opportunities for instruction and education of this ‘powerful means of publicity’, the Papal Encyclical officially changed the negative attitude towards cinema into a more belligerent one. Through the 1929 Holy Letter to the Faithful and the World, the Vatican also recognized the efforts undertaken by Catholic laymen, priests and other local church leaders to influence the motion picture industries.

Six years later Pope Pius XI increased his public support for the crusade against the sinful pictures by devoting an entire Encyclical Letter to them. In his famous *Vigilanti Cura* (29 June 1936), often seen as the Vatican’s salute to the Catholic *Legion of Decency*’s glorious victories in the United States,⁵ Pope Pius XI openly supported the work of all those who had accomplished, with a ‘painstaking vigilance over the motion picture’, ‘a great work for the protection of the morality of their people in their hours of leisure and recreation’.⁶ During the second half of the 1920s, a wide variety of initiatives were undertaken by Catholics in their attempt to enter into the field of the pictures—not only in the USA, but also on the Continent. In countries such as Belgium, France, Germany, Italy and the Netherlands, local Catholics had tried to produce, distribute and exhibit movies, well before the announcement of both Encyclicals, while they also took initiatives in the fields of censorship, film criticism, the public image and the audiences’ access to particular movies or cinemas.⁷ A key to this strategy, however, was trying to increase the Catholic influence on the *film exhibition market*. In fact, as John Trumbour wrote in his *Selling Hollywood to the World*, ‘in contrast to those in the United States, European Catholics had succeeded in creating an extensive exhibition circuit, particularly in Belgium, France, Germany, and Italy’.⁸ While ‘the U.S. industry under oligopoly conditions proved more easily threatened by the prospects of a massive Legion theatre boycott’, European Catholics had to deal with the sheer lack of a stable film production industry in many countries, where ‘independent companies created single pictures and then routinely folded’.⁹ Given the high cost of religiously-inspired film production, European Catholics had a keen eye in influencing cinemas in different directions, from public protests, silent boycotts, to structural interventions in the film exhibition sector (e.g. starting cinemas, creating networks of Catholic-inspired film theatres).

This article describes how the Catholic Church, and groups associated with the Catholic film movement, tackled this complex film exhibition problem during the interwar period. Given the growing capital investment and the risk environment of the film industries during the 1920s and 1930s, it must be clear that any attempt to increase or make a substantial influence on the film scene was doomed to be highly difficult—especially for the ideologically inspired or religious groups with high moral standards. The issue of trying to get such a grip on the exhibition market was, in fact, only part of a much wider strategy of attempts to *discipline* the mass medium and the audiences.

One of the few countries, where local Catholic leaders were relatively successful in influencing the film scene in many respects and the film exhibition scene in particular, was Belgium. In this Western European country with a population of about 7.5 million at that time, the Catholic Church still deeply influenced political, social and cultural life, especially in the northern part of the country (Flanders).

The film problem had been recognized quite early on, and after the First World War, the Church extended its policy to control life and leisure of the faithful and other citizens to the field of cinema. This all culminated by the end of the 1920s and into the 1930s into a strongly organized Catholic film movement.¹⁰

The role of Belgium in this area is interesting, also from an international perspective. It may be somewhat overstated, but quoting Trumpbour again, there is fair ground to claim that 'in the Catholic Church's international strategy on film, Belgium at times played a more central role than the U.S. Legion of Decency', mainly because for the Vatican 'the Belgian church stood out as the international command-and-control centre of the movement'.¹¹ Belgian Church leaders, active in the field of the movies, played a crucial role in the creation, in 1928, of the *Organization Catholique Internationale du Cinéma* (OCIC, or *International Catholic Film Organisation*),¹² which was first housed in The Hague but moved to Brussels in 1933. From its headquarters in the Belgian capital, OCIC functioned as a pressure group, 'organizing international conferences and fostering Catholic ownership and entrepreneurship in the exhibition sector'.¹³

This might all be true, but as this case study on the Catholic efforts to influence the Belgian film (exhibition) scene will indicate, things did not run so easy. After a short introduction on the wider strategies of the local Catholic Church in the field of the motion pictures during the interwar years, this paper concentrates on their efforts to get a grip upon the Belgian film exhibition sector. This will turn out to be an interesting power play, and a complex story of contradictions between religious passion, hard economic realities and legal boundaries.

Catholic Action and constraints to a liberal film scene

During the interwar years, Belgium was widely considered a small but lucrative and open film market.¹⁴ The kingdom, which had no significant film production of its own, followed a very liberal film policy. Lacking any regulation in terms of (import) quota or other measures to stimulate local film production, the country was also quite unique in its film censorship policy. Belgium, which had a high film attendance rate and a vivid film exhibition scene, did not have a compulsory film censorship and was one of the few countries without any adult film censorship system at all. Film distributors or exhibitors were not obliged to show their movies to the film censorship board and could distribute their movies freely. In September 1920, a film control law was passed through Parliament, stating that only when they wanted their movies to be screened for an audience including children or young adolescents (under 16 years old), did distributors or producers have to pass the state film control board.¹⁵ Many did for commercial reasons; although others chose their movies to be projected for adults only without the censors' approval. This liberal film censorship system served as a gateway for many controversial movies, including for instance Soviet pictures, to be shown freely in film theatres. Although pictures from a wide variety of countries circulated, the Belgian film market was clearly dominated by French (which were strongly present in the French-speaking southern part of the country and in the bilingual capital) and American pictures. Belgium's position as an open trade zone with a liberal film policy was much appreciated by major

film production centres such as the Hollywood majors, as the following quote from *The 1938 Film Year Book* underlines:

There are no laws prohibiting foreign exchange. Money made in Belgium may be freely transferred. Certain American companies have been able by the form of their organization and presentation of appropriate accounts to avoid local fiscal levies on large sums which have been shifted to America. Local laws do not give preference to other countries over American films. There are no quota or contingent laws in effect, nor are any such laws contemplated. Legislation which might reduce or prevent American distribution of motion pictures is not at present foreseen. It is probable that Belgium will continue to be considered a favoured field by American distributors . . . There is no compulsory censorship in Belgium. When pictures are released, the distributor is not obliged by the law to submit his films to any institution for censoring them.¹⁶

This image of a free, open market without any constraints, however, may be false. In fact, looking more closely at how movies were imported, distributed, controlled and screened in Belgium in these interwar years, various constraints to a free circulation can be observed. Besides the growing fiscal taxation on movies and cinemas in the 1920s, one should refer to the flipside of the official film censorship or control system. Although there was no compulsory censorship, most producers or distributors of commercial mainstream movies preferred their products to be screened by the official film control board. Research on the censorship practices by the Belgian board in the 1920s and 1930s indicates that only one third of the movies received the 'children-allowed' seal, while another third had to be cut. By the end of the 1930s, nearly half of the movies submitted to the official censors were labelled as 'Children not allowed'.¹⁷ Although liberal in principal and obeying the high-acclaimed constitutional freedom of expression and freedom of the press, the Belgian film control system was widely considered to be 'very strict'.¹⁸ Inspired by economic motives, many distributors took into account the censors' sensitivities and made pre-emptive cuts (or the practice of 'coupures préalables') before submitting the films to the censors.

Besides fiscal and economic constraints as well as severe forms of (self)censorship, the free circulation of movies was also hindered by other legal barriers. On the one hand, local municipal or city councils had the power to prevent the free exhibition of movies when public order or public safety was in danger. This legal measure, which was used quite frequently in the 1920s and the 1930s, appeared to be a fine instrument for particular lobby groups, such as Catholic or parent organizations when they organized picketing, boycotts or sheer riots on particular cinemas.¹⁹ On the other hand, laws on the defence of public morality gave judicial authorities the power to interfere in the free screening of movies. Again, religiously inspired lobby groups used this legislation to attack particular movies and cinemas.

By far the most powerful lobby, trying to restrict the free circulation of movies, was made up of a wide variety of Catholic organizations. As soon as cinema became a successful form of entertainment, Catholic laymen, priests and organizations drew their attention to the medium.²⁰ We will come back to Belgian Catholics' initiatives in the field of film exhibition, but already before the Great War, many cities and towns

counted Catholic cinemas or venues where movies were screened on a regular basis. Confronted by the emergence and success of commercial film theatres, also in rural areas where the Church still enjoyed a wide moral and social hegemony, local Catholic groups entered the scene of film exhibition—though this was largely considered to be a field of ‘evil’.

Although most of these initiatives were not coordinated by the central Belgian Church, they took place in the wake of a wider Catholic project to follow a sort of a state-in-the-state policy inspired by Catholic faith. Since the second half of the 19th century, Belgian society went through a process mostly indicated by the sociological term of ‘pillarization’. This referred to the attempt by various politico-ideological groups in society to organize or situate the different stages in citizens’ lives within the same pillar of institutions. Although several ideological/religious groups tried to build such a pillar of institutions around a core ideology or religion (e.g. Socialist, Liberal and Flemish-nationalist), the Catholics were by far the most successful in terms of the number of institutions, members and societal influence. Especially after the *Rerum Novarum* Encyclical on the condition of the working classes (15 May 1891),²¹ in which Pope Leo XIII discussed the relationship between government, business, labour, and the Church, the Catholic pillar of organizations took shape and gained power. In practice, this meant the Catholic pillar tried to influence one’s cultural, social and political life from birth to death—extending from Catholic-inspired schools, hospitals and other organizations within the medical and health care system, to institutions dealing with work (e.g. a Catholic trade union), politics (e.g. Christian-democratic parties), media consumption (e.g. Catholic newspapers, book clubs), leisure activities or cultural life (e.g. brass bands, youth organizations). Especially in Flemish rural areas, the Church had successfully installed local Catholic work, mainly located in and around parish halls—which were often also the first non-theatrical places where films were shown under Catholic guidance before the First World War.²²

After the Great War, these rather dispersed and uncoordinated initiatives in the field of film exhibition were supplemented by actions in the field of film production and distribution. Inspired by French and German initiatives in this field (e.g. *Etoile Film*, *Leo Films*), the Belgian film distribution company, *Brabo Films*, was founded in 1920 by Canon Abel Brohée. Like many such companies though, *Brabo Films* had great difficulties surviving in a highly competitive market.²³

By the mid-1920s, Belgian Catholics started joining forces in the field of the motion pictures. In 1925, during a Congress on Catholicism and the movies held in Brussels, the idea of a central network around Catholic cinemas was discussed. One year later such a central organization was launched,²⁴ although it only gained an official status in February 1928. This *Catholic Film Central* (CFC, in Dutch: *Katholieke Filmcentrale*, French: *Central Catholique du Film*) tried to operate as a cooperative and a lobby, defending the interests of the growing network of Catholic cinemas (e.g. by trying to get better conditions for the purchase of movies among commercial distributors). In the next few years, the CFC and the network of parochial and other Catholic cinemas started to stimulate a wider film movement, which would soon include operations in nearly all fields of the film scene.²⁵

The CFC soon started to screen movies on the basis of their moral values. In order to be sure what kind of movies could be purchased, distributed and screened, a Catholic film tribunal grew out of the CFC. In 1931, a *Catholic Film Control Board*

(CFCB, in Dutch: *Katholieke Filmkeurraad*, in French: *Comité Catholique de Sélection*), started to classify all movies on the Belgian film market, although it did not have, of course, any legal status in terms of cutting or censoring movies. The existence and practices of this CFCB implied a clear criticism towards and served as a lash on the workings of the official film control board, which was often criticized for being too liberal in terms of morality. The CFCB was headed by priests, but also included laymen and women, who systematically rated movies by using specific codes (from 1, or movies for all, to 6 referring to very dangerous movies). Inspired by the infamous book index, the CFCB also issued 'black lists' of 'objectionable' and 'condemned' movies.²⁶

In 1930–1931, also under the instigation of the CFC, a specialized film documentation and press agency, DOCIP (*Documentation Cinématographique de la Presse*), was launched in Brussels. Under the vigorous leadership of its founder, the Dominican priest, Felix Morlion, who was the driving force behind the Belgian Catholic film action and later became a more international figure,²⁷ DOCIP became a key organization for spreading the whole movement's spirit. As a propaganda instrument, DOCIP developed various lines, going from writing film reviews for the many Catholic newspapers and magazines;²⁸ spreading the CFCB's moral values through leaflets which were put in Church portals and other Catholic public buildings, to organizing boycotts of specific movies and theatres. DOCIP edited magazines, including a weekly guide, *Filmleiding*. From 1933 onwards, DOCIP also tried to get a more international scope, by bringing together the film ratings from other Catholic film movements and spreading its film reviews to foreign newspapers.²⁹

The year 1931 also saw the launching of a new distribution house. *Filmavox*, which replaced *Brabo Films*, operated as an independent commercial distributor, working for Catholic cinemas and the CFC's members, though it tried to get a more neutral profile in the market by working also for commercial film theatres.

A final instrument in this overall Catholic film movement was the creation of a network of local film leagues. Inspired by the American *Legion of Decency*, whose boycotts and successful actions were closely followed in DOCIP's publications, a wider mass movement was created. This *Catholic Film League* (CFL, in Dutch: *Katholieke Filmliga*; in French: *Ligue Catholique du Film*) tried to work through local units, which could be integrated in all sections of the movement. The local leagues were central in organizing Catholic-inspired screenings, in controlling the morality of other cinemas, in spreading DOCIP's magazines, leaflets, as well as the CFCB's ratings, in organizing concrete actions and boycotts against 'unhealthy' pictures and cinemas, etc.³⁰

Finally, in 1933, all those organizations were officially brought together under one umbrella movement, the *Catholic Film Action* (CFA, in Dutch: *Katholieke Filmactie*; French: *Centre Catholique d'Action Cinématographique*). The CFA operated as the central commanding post for the whole movement, consisting of the network of cinemas (CFC), a censorship board (CFCB), a press and propaganda instrument (DOCIP), magazines and publications (DOCIP's reviews published in many leading newspapers such as *De Standaard*), and a network of local film activists and organizations (CFL), while it had close ties to a distributor operating relatively independent in the market (*Filmavox*).³¹



FIGURE 1 Devotional picture *Crusade for the Motion Picture's Moral Improvement*, sought by Pope Pius XI. This little devotional picture, probably from 1937, was spread all over the Flemish Catholic community and contained a film pledge, clearly inspired by the American *Legion of Decency's* example. In the pledge, references are made to *Vigilanti Cura*, the actions by the *Catholic Film League*, and the *Catholic Film Control Board*. From the author's personal archive.

Summarizing, it was clear that from 1926 to 1933, the Belgian Catholics had created a strong network of organizations, which tackled the film problem in an integrated manner. Trying to export its ideas through the Brussels OCIC headquarters, the workings of the CFA were soon recognized by the Vatican. In April 1934, Cardinal Pacelli, who would become the controversial Pope Pius XII,³² published an open letter to the international Catholic film movement's president, Canon Brohée. In this letter, entitled *Le Pape et le Problème du Cinéma*, Cardinal Pacelli recognized and praised OCIC's apostolic workings. For Brohée, this letter was nothing less than the Pope's 'formal marching order for Catholics to organize themselves efficiently in the domain of cinema'.³³

It is important to acknowledge that this offensive, even militant spirit behind the Belgian Catholic film model, which was based on concrete solutions and an integrated, mundane approach to the film problem, was very much in line with a wider movement within the Church during the interwar years—mostly indicated as *Catholic Action*.³⁴ By the time cinema became a wide, popular medium, Pope Pius XI, whose pontificate started in February 1922, was confronted by a fierce process of modernization and secularization of society, symbolized by fashion and new mores

spread by modern mass media such as radio and the motion pictures (Figure 1). The Pope strongly propagated the need for a new modern crusade, where laymen and women were mobilized under the close supervision of local Church leaders, symbolizing a new fighting Church. This policy to (re-)Christianize all aspects of modern societies was linked to Pius XI's Encyclical *Ubi Arcano dei Consilio* (23 December 1922),³⁵ where he referred to all sorts of initiatives, organizations and works to spread Catholic values and political ideas in a more belligerent manner. The offensive's watchword was: 'Restoration of all things in Christ'. According to Felix Morlion, who was not only one of the enigmatic leaders of the Belgian Catholic Film Action, but also installed Catholic Action in other fields,³⁶ 'Catholic Action is nothing less than a total spiritual mobilization'.³⁷

Struggle for power on the film exhibition scene

It is clear that this Catholic film movement tried to act as a power bloc within the Belgian film scene. In its public discourse the CFA and OCIC used a nearly military or guerrilla terminology (e.g. words such as 'legion', 'marching order', 'crusade', 'action', 'strategy', 'bloc', 'boycott'), while discipline, hierarchy and clergymen's leadership were well installed in the overall structure. Rhetorically at least, it tried to present itself as a strong disciplining force within the field of cinema.

The key question, of course, is whether this discursive play also included some real power, especially in the field of film exhibition. We would like to split this question into two parts. Besides the issue of the network of Catholic cinemas and other forms of structural control over cinemas, we should acknowledge other actions that influenced the wider Belgian film exhibition scene.

In relation to the first question, research on the pre-First World War period showed that many Catholics were already active in the field of cinemas.³⁸ A meeting on Catholic initiatives on film exhibition, organized early January 1912 in Brussels, indicated that in more than 50 places Catholics organized film screenings on a regular basis. The representatives discussed the issue of how morally 'healthy' movies could be purchased and whether there should be no stronger central coordination. In most major cities such as Antwerp, Brussels, Ghent or Liège, Catholics responded to the growing success of cinema before the First World War by organizing regular screenings. Most of these cinemas were not public commercial cinemas, but rather parish halls or theatres linked to Catholic schools or other public institutions.

In the 1920s, this network of Catholic-inspired 'cinemas' grew further. Especially after 1926 and the launch of the CFC, a firm Catholic 'film theatre bloc' was present. From 1928 onwards, many cinemas emerged under the banner of 'good cinema' or 'family cinema' working within a Catholic religious sphere. This was also the case in smaller towns as the Appendix indicates.

It is difficult, though, to estimate the real number of such Catholic cinemas. It is risky to only rely upon data published in all kinds of writings, pamphlets and internal reports of the film movement. In his *Les Catholiques et le Problème du Cinéma* (1927) for instance, Brohée claimed that 'we already possess more than several hundreds of Catholic venues where film screenings are organized', and he continued that 'this figure continues to grow' and that now there is a 'strong Catholic power'

in the field of film exhibition.³⁹ In October 1928, the CFC manager, Leo Van Marcke, wrote to a small local distributor that the Film Central had already 150 members (film venues).⁴⁰ In 1930, the CFC claimed to have more than 200 cinemas in its network,⁴¹ a figure confirmed by Morlion, who added in his typical euphoric style that in Belgium in 1932 more than 500 film venues worked in a Catholic spirit.⁴² He immediately added that these were mostly non-commercial film venues in parish and workers' halls. In similar documents, originating from the CFA and OCIC, the same kind of high numbers of cinemas were mentioned, going up to more than 300 regular cinemas which were said to be part of the Catholic movement.⁴³

These are amazing figures when put into the perspective of the wider Belgian exhibition scene. According to one source, Belgium counted some 1129 cinemas in 1925, but lost one-third of them by the end of the decade (772 in 1929). In the 1930s, the Belgian film park grew again, up to 984 theatres in 1930, climbing to a peak of 1128 in 1934.⁴⁴ For Flanders, where the Church had a firm grip on social life and leisure time, 498 film exhibition venues were active in 1924—a figure that stayed fairly stable in the 1920s.⁴⁵

In order to get a better picture of this huge presence of Catholic-linked cinemas,⁴⁶ several case studies on local film exploitation histories were conducted. Besides commercial venues, we were strongly interested in 'pillarized' forms of film exploitation in Flanders. Taking a closer look at movie theatres in 46 towns in Flanders, of which 28 were situated in rural areas and 18 in urban centres, we came to some stunning results.⁴⁷ First of all, the strong presence of ideologically based film exhibition had to be acknowledged. In most of these 46 towns or cities, some form of pillarized film exhibition took place (in 39 cases). Besides socialist, liberal and Flemish-nationalist venues, it was clear that Catholic film venues were dominant. The presence of the latter grew in the 1930s, as well as after the Second World War, reaching a peak in the 1950s.⁴⁸

One recurrent pattern was that, while in many cities and towns one or more commercial regular cinemas appeared in the 1910s and 1920s, local Catholics reacted by starting a film venue of their own (see the Appendix). The initiative often came from local Catholic workings around parish halls and churches, mostly headed by the local priest. In many cities, such as Diksmuide (cinema *Onze Kring*, 1929–1961)⁴⁹, regular film venues were an integral part of parochial work. In other cases, Catholic workers' organizations took the lead, as this was the case for instance in the Flemish town of Waregem, where the Christian trade union's co-operative (ACW) started a regular cinema (*Cinema Eldorado*), probably in the mid-1930s, against a commercial cinema (*Onder Ons*).⁵⁰ In some cases, this was also linked to the Catholic party, such as in Ieper, where the Workers' Union started *Cinema Coliseum* in 1930.⁵¹ Many of these cinemas listened to the name of the parochial patron saint or to the Christ (*Rex*), but more often referred to a morally acceptable or 'healthy' cinema (*Goede Cinema*), aimed at family entertainment (e.g. *Familia*). Also, references to the parochial or patronate's house (*Patria*, *Cinema Parochiehuis*) were often used. In other cases, though, more traditional dreamlike titles, which were more current in commercial film exploitation, were used (e.g. *Eldorado*).

There were, of course, major differences between these Catholic-inspired venues. These differences can also be found in internal documents by the *Catholic Film Central* (CFC), the Catholic distributor *Filmavox* as well as the censorship board (CFCB).

The latter's rating system explicitly took these differences into account. In the 1930s the CFCB censored movies by using codes,⁵² which referred to movies for: (i) 'patronages' and Catholic schools (code 1, or movies 'for all', but mainly aimed at children), (ii) parochial or parish halls (code 2, morally good movies for parents with children), (iii) Catholic public and commercial cinemas (code 3, for adults, excluded to children and adolescents under 21), and (iv) other commercial cinemas (code 4, 'moral reservation'; code 5, 'dangerous'; code 6, 'bad'). The CFC, as the network of Catholic cinemas, as well as Filmavox seemed to commit themselves to only dealing with movies, which had been rated 1, 2 and 3.

CFC and Filmavox, however, were well aware of the major differences between these film venues in terms of economic power and audiences. While parish halls, parochial cinemas and film theatres linked to the CFC were economically less important, it turned out to be very difficult to reach more neutral cinemas. The latter were, as one internal document claims, much more important because 'their economic value exceeded the one of Catholic venues'.⁵³ Felix Morlion knew about the difficult position of Catholic cinemas. Compared to the big(ger) commercial cinemas, Catholic venues often bore the connotation of being inferior in terms of equipment and luxury, while they often screened older and still silent pictures. Morlion, who personally favoured experimental and even revolutionary (Soviet) cinema, also argued that most of these movies were artistically not very interesting. He concluded that 'we need more big public cinemas'.⁵⁴ Most cinemas, linked to the movement, were also located in smaller towns, while bigger cities were underrepresented. In Brussels, for instance, only five out of 103 cinemas could be considered, in 1937, to be part of the Catholic network.⁵⁵

These remarks not only referred to the Catholic cinemas' weak audience attraction, but also underlined their relative economic power. While the bloc of Catholic cinemas grew from 1928 to 1934, there seemed to be a slow decline in the CFC's revenues. According to a DOCIP publication, these grew from nearly half a million Belgian Francs in 1928–1929 to more than 3 million in 1933–1934, followed by a stabilization and even decrease in revenues. Although the CFA claimed that the Catholic cinemas were a 'real power' in the field of film exhibition and also had an impact on distributors who liked to deal with such a wide network, they could not deny the decline.⁵⁶ The low-scale and technically primitive Catholic cinemas clearly had growing difficulties with financing technical innovations in terms of sound.⁵⁷ By the end of 1937, Felix Morlion admitted that 'our film venues now have a relatively weak part of the overall film exhibition scene', and also that apart from the Catholic cinemas 'practically no exhibitor takes into account the decision of the Catholic Film Control Board'.⁵⁸

Another clear indicator of the movement's waning power and growing economic difficulties by the mid-1930s related to Filmavox, the independent but Catholic-inspired distributor who tried to work for the wider film exhibition scene. Although a priest was among the board, Filmavox often purchased movies that were afterwards rated with a code 4 ('moral reservation'). By the mid-1930s, after a long period of internal dissatisfaction, the issue was openly discussed leading to a harsh confrontation between a 'fundamentalist' and a more 'realist' position. While the first criticized Filmavox's management of giving in to commercial pressures and a cheap, morally 'unhealthy' film production, the latter referred to the difficult relationship

between the market and ethics. Besides techniques such as block booking, the distributor acknowledged the intrinsic audience attractiveness of controversial movies such as *Madame Bovary* (Jean Renoir; France, 1933), *Son Autre Amour* (*His Other Love*, Alfred Machard; France, 1933) or *Rue sans nom* (*Street Without a Name*, Pierre Chenal; France, 1934)—all purchased and distributed by Filmavox, but afterwards rated by the CFCB with codes 4 or 5.⁵⁹

Summarizing, we could argue that the often-euphoric public discourse could not hide the Catholic cinemas' relatively weak position on the market—which ranged from often-inferior technical infrastructure, old-fashioned programming, weak audience attraction to a degrading economic power. Although the Catholic film movement had successfully created a fairly *pillarized viewing pattern* in smaller towns and in more rural areas, it became clear that the ambition to come to a *pillarized viewing nation* had largely failed.

War on cinema

Besides these efforts to gain some structural power on the market, the Belgian Catholic film movement developed other forms of pressure on the film exhibition scene. Especially from the mid-1930s, a wide range of actions and campaigns were organized to increase the pressure on cinemas, mainly the big commercial ones.

This issue of how the Belgian Catholics tried to influence the film scene, besides more structural economic measures, is a complex one which cannot be fully examined in this paper. The strategy to 'sanitize' the market ('the cinema war') contained many tactics and several calculated campaigns. A short overview of some of those campaigns and means of actions, will illustrate that the movement may have been more successful here than in its structural approach.

The Catholic film movement often combined several means of action when they started a campaign against a 'sinful' cinema or particular movies. Besides its power in the field of reviews and newspapers (Catholic newspapers dominated the market in Flanders), the movement also used leaflets targeting particular cinemas and/or movies. These leaflets (called *Filmleiding*/*Film Guide*), which contained the censors' decisions, were widely distributed and shown in parish halls and other Catholic public spaces. Priests often referred to these lists in their public address during Masses or other public religious meetings. The CFL could organize picketing actions and boycotts, while local groups were also trained in less spectacular forms of disciplining the local theatre owners. An internal report⁶⁰ indicated how laymen and women could increase control or power over local cinemas:

Action on film venues must be done silently and with the greatest discretion... The main directives are: (1) personal contact with the cinema owner, (2) proposition to help him in terms of programming—try to get him into the Catholic Film Central's network, (3) continuous control and check on the venue, in different directions.

Another means referred to using, appealing to or mobilizing state institutions to intervene. This was often the case on a local level, where majors or city councils were

asked or stimulated to intervene when public order and safety was in danger. A notorious case and a moment of glory for the CFA were the difficulties around the movie *La Garçonne* (*The Tomboy*, Jean de Limur; France, 1936) in 1937. This movie was a remake of an older French-Belgian production from 1923 (*La Garçonne*, English title: *The Bachelor Girl*, Armand du Plessy), which had caused wide controversy and even diplomatic problems with France. For the beginning of the 1920s, Du Plessy's version was a sharp adaptation of Victor Marguerite's scandalous novel (1922) about a woman with rather frank opinions (and practices) concerning love, marriage and life style. The remake of this enigmatic picture was enough for the Belgian Catholics to boycott the movie, to organize local demonstrations, thus urging local councils to intervene and forbid the screening of the movie.⁶¹

The movement also used higher political powers for action against dangerous movies and cinemas. This can be illustrated by several cases,⁶² including the one on the American movie *Nudist Land*, which was shown in several major cities in Belgium. The picture, which propagated nudism, was considered pornographic and the CFA started a wide campaign through leaflets, local film leagues, boycotts, etc. Besides this, several judicial actions were undertaken and the matter was brought up in Parliament. A well-respected senator of Catholic signature, Viscount du Bus de Warnaffe, started a debate about the movie. The morality and anti-pornographic movie campaign alarmed the American Embassy and finally reached Washington. The Belgian government also put the issue on its Cabinet meeting agenda (23 June 1939), deciding that a stricter control on pornographic movies should be installed.⁶³

In the 1930s, several campaigns were organized, targeting specific cinemas, movies or genres.⁶⁴ These campaigns and the war on cinema in general caused a wide resentment among commercial cinema owners and their associations. From 1936, the conflict between the CFA and the Belgian association of cinema owners (*Association Cinématographique Belge*/ACB) came to a head. In April 1936, the ACB turned to the Catholic film movement with the threat to sue Catholic cinemas for illegal competition and for not taking into account legal requirements for cinema exhibition (e.g. weak safety measures).⁶⁵ The cinema directors' association had already informed the Minister of Justice on the matter of illegal film exhibition among Catholics.⁶⁶ Now, the ACB started to monitor, albeit with discretion, how Catholics organized their film screenings on a local basis. The association made long lists of how Catholic film houses violated the laws on censorship (screening movies which were not presented to the official film control board), safety measures and taxes. The CFA responded by increasing boycotts, spreading *Filmleiding*-leaflets, publishing negative reviews and organizing wider campaigns. All in all, the cinema war would last till early 1939, when DOCIP and representatives from commercial distributors and cinema owners signed an agreement to appease the cinema war. Referring to the many incidents and campaigns, both parties agreed to avoid actions that might cause economic or physical damage. DOCIP promised not to take any further steps towards city councils to ban movies (Figure 2). The Catholic film organization agreed instead to make lists of anti-religious, pornographic or morally unsound movies and present them to the film professionals' association.⁶⁷ This agreement had some effect, but later that year the *Nudist Land* controversy set off the anti-pornographic campaign again. The conflict only stopped with the Germans marching in (May 1940).



FIGURE 2 *Is the World of the Movies so Bad?* A 1937 poster from the Catholic Film League, where the organisation promotes *Filmleiding* (Film Guide) and film reviews in Catholic newspapers. Source: AMVC.

The film exhibition scene would soon be reorganized, while the Catholic film movement dissolved and would only re-emerge in a clandestine formation.

Conclusion

While the role of Catholics in American cinema has been a major topic in film history studies, mainly around the *Legion of Decency's* successful operations,⁶⁸ the efforts of the Roman Church in the field of European cinema are still largely unknown. After introducing some key texts from the Vatican, this article concentrated on the Belgian Catholic film movement, which is considered to have played a key role in a more militant Catholic approach to the film problem in the interwar years. After some rather dispersed actions, mainly in the field of film distribution and exhibition, Belgian Catholics translated the ideas of Catholic Action and an 'offensive' Church into a well-structured, integrated 'solution'. The highly hierarchical structure integrated a top-down (priests as generals) and a bottom-up approach (laymen as soldiers within leagues), while it tried to cover and influence a wide range of the contemporary film cultural industry (from some minor production projects, to distribution, exhibition, criticism, creation of a mass movement, play upon public opinion, etc.). These fields of action were often combined with the ultimate goal of 'sanitizing' the film output in cinemas.

The case study threw up many questions, which might be of relevance for researchers in film history and film exhibition history in particular. Besides questions on the importance of non-commercial and extra-theatrical film exhibition, the present study also explores the issue of film exhibition in rural areas.⁶⁹ The main question of the article is, of course, related to how religious and ideologically inspired groups with high moral values might influence the film exhibition scene, which was characterized by fierce competition, the formation of trusts, high-risk investment and unpredictable audience tastes. This case study on the Belgian Catholics' strategy and tactics looked at structural operations and wider actions in disciplining the field. At first sight, the CFA's policy of creating cinemas, combining them in networks and a major bloc, seemed to be successful. The movement seemed to be able to have an influence on a relatively large amount of film venues, while in many locations it installed competition with commercial and other pillarized forms of film exhibition. Besides this structural approach, Belgian Catholics tried to enhance their influence, mainly from 1933–1934 onwards, by a wide array of actions against other cinemas, particular controversial films or type of movies. Clearly inspired by what happened in the USA with the *Legion*, the CFA and its propaganda instrument, DOCIP, launched a harsh war on cinema. Given the militant nature of this offensive, the movement became a public factor of influence, although in that same period Catholic cinemas and film venues had major difficulties in maintaining their position. The movement tried to enhance its position by co-operating with other political formations (e.g. the Flemish-nationalists) and by mobilizing other powerful institutions and organizations within the Catholic hemisphere (e.g. workers' organizations, political party, parliament representatives, local politicians). Finally, and referring to the 1939 agreement with the hostile distributors and cinema owners, it is clear that the movement tried to (discursively) legitimize its position. We might conclude that the structural approach to the film exhibition problem was only one part of the power

bloc—and a fickle one too. Referring to sociological theories on public morality and moral panics,⁷⁰ it is clear that the Catholic movement succeeded in maintaining its image of a powerful public *moral guardian* in the field of the movies, trying to discipline the field of cinema and the cultural practice of cinema-going.

Acknowledgment

The author thanks Dr Philippe Meers, Lies Van de Vijver, Dr Roel Vande Winkel and Gert Willems, as well as John De Doncker and Hilde Van Liempt (DOCIP).

Notes

- 1 Quote from: Pope Pius XI, *Divini Illius Magistri*, *Encyclical of Pope Pius XI on Christian Education* (Vatican, 31 September 1929). See: www.vatican.va/holy_father/pius_xi/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xi_enc_31121929_divini-illius-magistri_en.html.
- 2 See Abel Brohée, *Les Catholiques et le Problème du Cinéma* (Louvain, Secrétariat Général d'Action Catholique, 1927).
- 3 Brohée, *Les Catholiques et le Problème du Cinéma*, 5–13.
- 4 Father Abel Brohée (1880–1947) was the leader of the Belgian *Catholic Film Action* and became from 1932 onwards the president of the International Catholic Organisation of Cinema (OCIC/*Organisation Catholique Internationale de Cinéma*). Léo Bonneville, *Soixante-dix ans au service du cinéma et de l'audiovisuel: OCIC* (Québec, Fides, 1998), 21, 233–236.
- 5 Frank Walsch, *Sin and Censorship: the Catholic Church and the motion picture industry* (New Haven, CT, Yale University Press, 1996), 145.
- 6 Quotes from: Pope Pius XI, *Vigilanti Cura*—*Encyclical Letter* (Vatican, 1936). See: www.vatican.va/holy_father/pius_xi/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xi_enc_29061936_vigilanti-cura_it.html.
- 7 Robert Molhant, *Les Catholiques et le Cinéma: une étrange histoire de craintes et de passions. Les débuts: 1895–1935* (Brussels, OCIC, 2000). Bonneville, *Soixante-dix ans au service du cinéma et de l'audiovisuel: OCIC*, 9–26.
- 8 John T. Trumbour, *Selling Hollywood to the World* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2001), 215.
- 9 Trumbour, *Selling Hollywood to the World*, 215.
- 10 See Guido Convents, *Les catholiques et le cinéma en Belgique (1895–1914)*, in Roland Cosandey, André Gaudreault and Tom Gunning (eds) *Une invention du diable? Cinéma des premiers temps et religion* (Eng.: *An Invention of the Devil?*) (Sainte Foy, Presses de l'Université Laval, 1992), 21–43.
- 11 Trumbour, *Selling Hollywood to the World*, 213.
- 12 In a leaflet, published by OCIC by the mid-1930s (Louvain, KADOC, KFL Archive, box 42, no specific date), the international organization claims that it had members or close ties with national Catholic film movements in 17 countries, including Austria, Canada, France (e.g. *Centrale Catholique du Cinéma et de la Radio*), Germany (e.g. *Filmarbeitsgemeinschaft Deutscher Katholiken*), Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Spain, Switzerland, the USA (*Legion of Decency*). It is not sure whether all these organizations were members, but at the end of the 1930s, the list of members

of OCIC's General Assembly contained representatives of 13 countries, including the *Legion of Decency*. Marie-Louise Geysen, *De Katholieke Filmactie in België* (1920–1940) (Ghent, Ghent University MA thesis, 1983), 23. In 2001 OCIC became part of SIGNIS, the World Catholic Association for Communication. Its headquarters are still located in Brussels (www.signis.net).

- 13 Trumpbour, *Selling Hollywood to the World*, 213.
- 14 See Daniel Biltereyst, Philippe Meers, Lies Van de Vijver and Gert Willems, Cinema exhibition in Flanders in the 20th century (paper at the Cinema in Context Conference, Amsterdam, 20–21 April 2006). See also Trumpbour, *Selling Hollywood to the World*, 213, who wrote that Belgium was 'celebrated as a relative free-trade zone in film by the MPPDA'.
- 15 Liesbet Depauw and Daniel Biltereyst, De kruistocht tegen de slechte cinema: over de aanloop en de start van de Belgische filmkeuring (1911–1929), *Tijdschrift voor Mediageschiedenis*, 8(2005), 3–26.
- 16 Belgium, in: Jack Alicoate, *The 1938 Film Year Book* (New York, The Film Daily, 1938), 1173.
- 17 Data based on a ongoing research project on the history of the official and Catholic film censorship in Belgium (*Verboden Beelden*, SRC-project 2003–2006, Ghent University). Thanks to Liesbet Depauw.
- 18 This was how the Belgian censorship system was labelled in several *Film Year Books*, such as in the 1929 version (ed. Jack Alicoate, 1929), 1013.
- 19 A notorious and symbolic case was the French-Belgian movie *La Garçonne* (1923, Du Plessy), which caused many riots and boycotts, leading to its banning in several cities such as Antwerp. See: KFL, De Gemeentelijke machten en de Cinema, *Filmliga* (Brussels, November–December 1937, 5), 6–7. Daniel Biltereyst, "Down with French *vaudevilles*!" The Catholic film movement's resistance and boycott of French cinema in the 1930s, *Studies in French Cinema*, 6(1), 2006, 34.
- 20 Convents, *Les catholiques et le cinéma en Belgique*, 22–33.
- 21 *Rerum Novarum. Encyclical on capital and labor* (Vatican, 15.5.1891). See: www.vatican.va/holy_father/leo_xiii/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_15051891_rerum-novarum_en.html
- 22 Rik Stallaerts and Luc Schokkaert, *Onder dak. Een eeuw volks- en gildehuizen* (Gent, Bijdragen Museum van de Vlaams Sociale Strijd, Uitgave Provinciebestuur Oost-Vlaanderen, 1987).
- 23 Marie-Louise Geysen, *De Katholieke Filmactie in België* (1920–1940) (Ghent, Ghent University MA thesis, 1983), I, 154. See also: Felix Morlion, *The Apostolate of Public Opinion* (Montreal, Fides, 1944), 65. Lieve Dhaene, De Offensiebeweging in Vlaanderen 1933–1939: Katolieken tussen traditie en vooruitgang, *Belgisch Tijdschrift voor Nieuwste Geschiedenis/Revue Belge d'Histoire Contemporaine* (1/2, 1986), 227–268.
- 24 *De Film: Moderne Grootmacht* (Bruges, CFA, 1937), 60
- 25 A major problem for historical research on the Belgian Catholic film movement of this period is that the pre-Second World War archive of the headquarters in Brussels was confiscated and probably destroyed by the Gestapo. Geysen, *De Katholieke Filmactie in België*, 138–145.
- 26 Catholic priests and laymen went to film theatres to see and rate movies, using detailed printed forms. The latter were sent to the Brussels' headquarters, where a select group of priests and clergymen deliberated on a final rating. This system

- of reviewing movies resembled somewhat the Legion of Decency's ratings, but was not based on it. Gregory D. Black, *The Catholic Crusade against the Movies*, 1940–1975 (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994), 25–26. James M. Skinner, *The Cross and the Cinema: the Legion of Decency and the National Catholic Office for Motion Pictures*, 1933–1970 (Westport, Praeger, 1993), 49–51.
- 27 Felix Morlion (1904–1987), who was an enigmatic propagandist for an offensive Church against the modern mass media, became a close ally to Pope Pius XII, and after the Second World War went to the Vatican to found and lead the influential International University of Social Studies. Bernard De Clercq, André Felix Morlion: Vechter voor wereldvrede, *Dominikaans Leven*, 58(2001), 15–19.
- 28 In 1937, DOCIP's *Filmleiding* and articles appeared in some 60 newspapers and magazines, according to: *De Film: Moderne Grootmacht*, 59.
- 29 Geysen, *De Katholieke Filmactie in België*, 97. According to Morlion, in a book published in 1944 (*The Apostolate of Public Opinion*, 111, 119), DOCIP launched in 1938 a weekly international publication in French and German. Bonneville, *Soixante-dix ans au service du cinéma et de l'audiovisuel*, 19. Although DOCIP has lost most of its power, it still exists, publishes two Belgian film journals and has its headquarters in Brussels (see: www.filmmagie.be).
- 30 Geysen, *De Katholieke Filmactie in België*, 98–119. *De Film*, 59–60.
- 31 The missing link in this chain was, of course, production. This issue and a case study on how the CFA tried to intervene in the few popular film productions in Belgium, see: Daniel Biltereyst and Sofie Van Bauwel, Whitey, in: Ernest Mathijs (ed.) *The Cinema of the Low Countries* (London/New York, Wallflower Press/Columbia University Press, 2004), 49–60.
- 32 Peter Godman, *Hitler and the Vatican: inside the secret archives that reveal the new story of the Nazis and the church* (New York, Free Press, 2004).
- 33 Cardinal Pacelli, *Le Pape et le problème du cinéma. Lettre de S.E. le Cardinal PACELLI au Président de OCIC* (Louvain, 1934). Archive: KADOC, Louvain, KFL, box 40.
- 34 Rik Stallaerts and Luc Schokkaert, *Onder dak* (Gent, Provinciebestuur, 1987), 187–188. In Belgium, in the 1930s, the idea of a Catholic Action was also translated in terms of 'offensive' (cf. 'Offensiefbrigades')—where Morlion played a key role again. The idea and practices of *Catholic Action* were also introduced in the USA. See e.g. the book *Catholic Action in Practice*, written by the *Motion Picture Herald's* editor Martin Quigley, Jr, and Edward M. Connors (New York, Random House, 1963, with a foreword by Francis Cardinal Spellman).
- 35 *Encyclical Ubi Arcano dei Consilio* (Vatican, 23 December 1922). See: www.vatican.va/holy_father/pius_xi/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xi_enc_23121922_ubi-arcano-dei-consilio_en.html.
- 36 Besides a *Catholic Film Action*, which was by far the best organized one, there were also Catholic Actions in the fields of the press, radio, books and theatre. See Geysen, *De Katholieke Filmactie in België*, 7. Also: Felix Morlion, De coördinatie tusschen de technische diensten en de werken der Katholieke Actie, in: *Verhandelingen van het VIe Congres van Mechelen* (Brussels, 1936), 232–233.
- 37 Morlion, *The Apostolate of Public Opinion*, 41.
- 38 Convents, Les catholiques et le cinéma en Belgique, 33–34.
- 39 'Nous possédons déjà plusieurs centaines de salles catholiques où des séances cinématographiques sont organisées. Ce chiffre grandit et ces salles forment une puissance forte catholique.' Brohée, *Les Catholiques et le Problème du Cinéma*, 25.

- 40 Letter by Leo Van Marcke (CFC) to Clemens De Landtsheer (film producer, *Flandria Film* archive), 29.10.1928 (Gemeentearchief Temse, Flandria Film Archive, piece 1.1.92).
- 41 Cinema, *La Revue du Film. Organe des Organisations Cinématographiques Catholiques Belges* (Brussels, 8.9.1930).
- 42 Felix Morlion, *Filmleiding* (Louvain, Davidsfonds, 1932), 7.
- 43 In the mid 1930s, the CFA claimed that the ‘bloc’ of Catholic cinemas counted more than 300 theatres. See OCIC, Untitled leaflet (Louvain, KADOC, KFL Archive, box 42, no specific date), 6.
- 44 Van Heghe, *Film als bron voor geschiedschrijving* (Gent, MA thesis, 1978), 48.
- 45 Biltereyst *et al.*, Cinema exhibition in Flanders in the 20th century, 12.
- 46 It is difficult to identify these early Catholic forms of film exhibitions, not only because they were not registered in film industry yearbooks—often published by commercial cinema associations which saw these Catholic cinemas as illegal and unjustified competition. Also, it turned out that many of these Catholic theatres worked in a semi-public sphere and presented their screening sessions as private initiatives. In May 1940, the archive of the Belgian Catholic film movement in Brussels was confiscated by the Gestapo and probably destroyed later (Dhaene, *De Offensiebeweging in Vlaanderen 1933–1939*).
- 47 These case studies were thorough micro-historical case studies carried out by MA students over several months, based on information gathered in different kinds of local archives. This additional research in local archives was necessary, because the (commercially inspired) industry yearbooks give limited information on the ideological background of film exhibition venues. We did, however, find lists of pillarized film clubs in some yearbooks. The research was carried out in the following 46 towns in Flanders: Lier, Oostkamp, Knokke Heist, Sint Kruis, Oostende, Jabbeke, Kortrijk, Harelbeke, Wevelgem, Avelgem, Diksmuide, Nieuwpoort, Veurne, Pittem, Oostrozebeke, Waregem, Roeselare, Lichtervelde, Ieper, Poperinge, Destelbergen/Heusden, Dendermonde, Erpe Mere, Zottegem, Kluisbergen, Oudenaarde, Deinze, Arendonk, Dessel, Liedekerke, Londerzeel, Kontich, Hoboken, Mortsel, Hemiksem, Kessel, Schilde, Hoogstraten, Mol, Borgerhout, Wilrijk, Boechout, Balen, Zwijndrecht, Burcht and Herentals.
- 48 The growth of the various cinema chains along the different pillars can be observed in the next table:

	Number of film venues	Pillarized film venues	Catholic venues	Socialist venues	Liberal venues	Flemish-nationalist venues
1910–1920	51	10	6	3	1	1
1920–1930	115	26	12	7	6	2
1930–1940	134	41	22	8	7	4
1940–1950	134	47	30	7	7	3
1950–1960	157	44	29	7	6	
1960–1970	136	30	20	8	6	
1970–1980	71	12	6	2	3	
1980–1990	48	4	4			
1990–2000	21	1	1			

- 49 Joke Bekaert, *Het cinemaverleden van Diksmuide* (Gent, paper, 2005).
- 50 Tom Coucke, *Filmexploitatie in Waregem* (Gent, paper, 2005). See also e.g. the case of Poperinge (*Katholieke Cinema/Cinema Royal*), where the Christian workers league ACW started a cinema in 1930. See: Pieter Demaeght, *Cinema in Poperinge* (Gent, 2005), 17.
- 51 The cinema might have started in 1924, but seemed to become a regular film theatre in 1930. See: Katrien Goudeseune, *Cinema in Ieper* (Gent, paper, 2005), 17.
- 52 *Commission de censure catholique* (internal document, CFC, in: Louvain, Kadoc archive, KFL, no. 39).
- 53 *De Film*, 1937, 49.
- 54 Morlion, *Filmleugen*, 1932, 7–8.
- 55 *De Film: Moderne Grootmacht*, 1937, 35. See also J. Cartuyvels, *De kinemazaal, Verhandelingen van het VIe Congres van Mechelen* (Brussels, 1936), 126–136.
- 56 The revenues for the CFC (or bloc of Catholic cinemas) can be found in: CFA, *Het Middenbestuur der Katholieke Filmaktie, Filmliga* (4: 10), 2. The concrete data:

Season	Revenue (in Belgian Francs)
1928–1929	482,100
1929–1930	1,315,528
1930–1931	2,069,336
1931–1932	1,603,248
1932–1933	2,365,858
1933–1934	3,934,124
1934–1935	2,716,629
1935–1936	2,537,060

- 57 According to one of the CFA leaders, only half of the Catholic cinemas (total of about 300) had proper audio equipment by 1936. J. Cartuyvels, *De kinemazaal*, 127.
- 58 Felix Morlion, *Is de Katholieke Filmcentrale nog noodig?*, *Filmiga* (5: 8, November–December 1937), 1.
- 59 Internal document, no date, no title, but probably from the mid-1930s (Louvain, Kadoc Archive, KFL, box 42, 10 pages).
- 60 Father Lunders, *Plan van Samenwerking tusschen Offensief-Brigade en Katholieke Filmiga* (Louvain, Kadoc Archive, KFL, box 40).
- 61 A keen illustration can be found in a town called Avelgem, where local Catholics had picketed in front of the ‘liberal’ cinema, *Ons Huis*, while they also caused a lot of disturbance in the theatre itself. In September 1937, the local council decided that the screening had to be stopped. See: Letter Mayor of Avelgem 16.9.1937, in Municipal Archive Avelgem.
- 62 By far the most spectacular and successful action in this respect was the one against the French-German movie *La Kermesse Héroïque* (1935), made by the Belgian director Jacques Feyder. In this prestigious film, Feyder created a Breughelian 16th-century Flanders, telling how local people seemed to ‘collaborate’ with the Spanish invaders. For local Flemish-nationalists, the movie was a disgrace for

Flemish cultural heritage and identity, because men were presented as cowards and women as all too willing 'whores'. Catholic film leaders used this protest to organize a wide boycott of the movie, mainly through a media campaign (articles in the press), leaflets and the workings of their local Catholic film leagues. In many towns and cities where the movie was supposed to be shown, there was picketing and even riots when the movie was forbidden by several local city councils, the *Kermesse* affair soon became a national and even government issue for several months. Benoît Mihaïl, *La Kermesse Héroïque, Un hommage à la Flandre?*, *Cahiers d'Histoire du Temps Présent*, 10(2002), 43–77.

- 63 Trumpbour, *Selling Hollywood to the World*, 223–224.
- 64 Another spectacular and long campaign was that against French movies—indicated as the *war against French vaudevilles*. For an extended analysis, see: Daniel Biltereyst, "Down with French *vaudevilles*!", 33–40.
- 65 Letter by ACB to Father Morlion, CFA, 11 April 1937, Archive Archbishop Mechelen, Fonds Van Roey, box 'Film'.
- 66 Letter by H. Verpoorten (ACB) to the Minister of Justice, 17 March 1936 (Rijksarchief Beveren, PK ANTW 2003 B, box 637).
- 67 Verslag van de overeenkomst getroffen tusschen de afgevaardigden van de syndicale kamer voor cinematografie en de afgevaardigden van DOCIP, 17 januari 1939 (Louvain, Kadoc archive, KFL, box 40).
- 68 See the work done by: Gregory D. Black (*The Catholic Crusade against the Movies*, 1997; *Hollywood censored: morality, Catholics, and the movies*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994), Francis Couvares (Hollywood, Main Street, and the Church, in F. Couvares, ed., *Movie Censorship and the American Culture*, Washington, Smithsonian Institution Press, 1996, 129–158), Thomas Doherty (*Pre-Code Hollywood: sex, immorality, and insurrection in American cinema, 1930–1934*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), Richard Maltby (The Production Code and the Hays Office, in Tino Balio, ed. *Grand Design*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1993, 37–72), James M. Skinner (*The Cross and the Cinema*, 1993), Frank Walsch (*Sin and Censorship*, 1996).
- 69 See: Robert C. Allen, Relocating American Film History: the 'problem' of the empirical, *Cultural Studies*, 20(1) (2006), 48–88.
- 70 Chas Critcher (ed.), *Moral panics and the media* (New York, Open University Press, 2006).
- 71 This list is based on several sources, including students' papers, as well as on: Roger De Smul, Bioscopen te Gent en omliggende gemeenten, *Grasduintje* (2001–2004). On Verviers: Michel Bedeur and Paolo Zagaglia, *Cinéma 1896–1993 Verviers* (Andrimont-Dison, Editions Irezumi, 1993), 232–233. On Bruges: Jaak A. Rau, *Een eeuw Brugge 1901–2000* (Brugge, Van de Wiele, 2003), 36.

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The Cinema of the Low Countries (London, Wallflower, 2004), *Understanding Reality TV* (London, Routledge, 2004), *Media Cultures in a Changing Europe* (Bristol, Intellect Books, 2004), *Big Brother International* (London/New York, Wallflower/Columbia UP, 2004), *Communication Theory and Research in Europe* (London, Sage, 2005) and *Studies in French Cinema* (London, Intellect, 2006).

Appendix: Selection of regular Catholic cinemas in Flanders (period, theatre's name, city)⁷¹

1912–1955	De Ware Vrienden (1926) Goede Cinema Het Volk (1932) Vriendenkring (1945) De Kring	Gentbrugge
1912–?	Cinéma des Familles	Verviers
1913–?	Familiecinema Renova	Lier
1914–?	Volkskinema	Kortrijk
1914–?	Katholieken Kring	Zottegem
1919–?–1975	Volkskring (1950) Capitole	Deinze
1920s–1975	Familiekinema Forum	Wetteren
1920–?	De Vriendschap	Aalst
1922–1964	Familiekinema (also: Ciné Sint-Martinus)	Tessenderlo
1924–?	Familia	Ronse
1928–1985	Belgica	Dendermonde
1928–?	Het Patronaat	Mere
1928–1934	Katholieke Volkskring	Ardoioie
1929–1961	Onze Kring	Diksmuide
1930–1974	Coliseum	Ieper
1930–1953	Katholieke Kinema (Royal)	Poperinge
1930–1957 (?)	Patria (1930: Nova)	Roeselaere
? (1930s)–1976	Eldorado	Waregem
1932–1940	Cinéma Catholique (Au Middenstand) (De Familie Cinema)	Brugge
1934–1939	Roxy	Verviers
1934–1976	Cinema Feestzaal (1955: Rubens)	Avelgem
1936–1956	Nova	Gent

(continued)

Appendix: Continued

1938–1950	Cinema Gildenhuis	Laarne
1944–?	Pax	Roeselare
1945–1951	Dux	Gent
1945–1982	Cinema Familia (1953: Rex)	Oudenaarde
1945–1958	Leopold II	Kortrijk
1946–1950s	Cinema Volksbond	Oostende
1946–1997	Gintsezaal	Oostrozebeke
1947–late 1950s	Nova	Oostende
1947–1965	Pax	Erpe
1948–1965 (?)	Cinema Parochiehuis	Heusden
1948–1961	Cinema Excelsior	Wevelgem
1950–1962	Cinema Melac	Zwijndrecht
1955–?	Cinema Gildenhuis	Melle
1958–1981	Cenakel	Oostende
1958–1983	Concordia	Oostrozebeke
1962–1963	Hoger Op	Jabbeke